HARAMBEE FLAME

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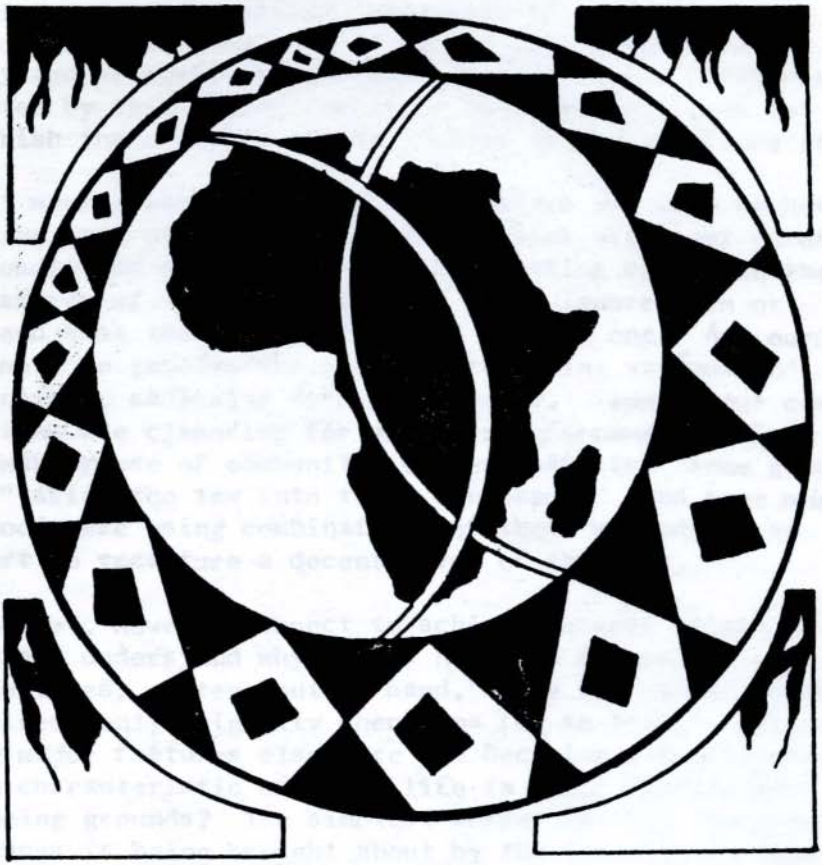

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Why The Gangs?

Alarm, fear, anger, frustration, a sense of hopelessness, a feeling that things have gotten completely out of control. These states of mind are all characteristic of African communities in many U.S. cities today as these communities find themselves faced with increasing levels of violence--drug-related, gang-related, and otherwise. Of course it is true that it is not only neighborhoods populated primarily by African people that are being confronted by this bloody reality. But that fact does not diminish the severity of the problem as we experience it.

If it were a matter only of drug-dealers and gang members killing each other, our emotional alarms might not go off so loudly and so much. But we are getting caught in the crossfires of these battles. We can't ignore them or pretend that the problem is not a serious one. And our attempts to resolve the problem are taking various and, oftentimes, radically different shapes. Some of our communities are clamoring for police reinforcements. Some are making use of community-resident patrols. Some groups are "taking the law into their own hands." And some neighborhoods are using combinations of these methods in an effort to recapture a decent level of safeness.

We cannot, however, expect to achieve success unless we know and understand why things have, in so many of our communities, gotten "out of hand." Why are gangs, which remained "only" big-city phenomena for so long, now becoming major features elsewhere and becoming significantly more characteristic of urban life in their traditional stomping grounds? The simplest answer is that the growth of gangs is being brought about by the increase in dope business and the competition for control of shares of that business. That is a simple answer but an inadequate one. Maybe the clearest evidence that that answer is not sufficient is the fact that substantial numbers of these gang members are twelve and thirteen-year-olds and younger. These are, in our traditional ways of distinguishing between levels of physical maturity, children.

The young ages of these "gangsters" raises a number of

questions: Where is parental supervision? What has become of the capacity of family to be a major influence on its children? What kinds of values are children learning? It appears that something has broken down, fallen apart.

Certainly, one important development has been the substantial increase in the number of our families being headed by only one parent, generally the mother. If a female parent is not working, the obvious problem is that of poverty. In addition, there is the matter of the difficulty she is going to have in trying to bring her male children into responsible manhood without the benefit of there being a responsible man in the house for her boys to model themselves after. If the mother is working--probably at low wages--she may not have enough and/or appropriate time in the home to provide her children with the necessary quantity and quality of guidance.

Maybe of even greater impact than the above is the fact that some thief has slipped into our communities and stolen damned near all our glue. Since we were first brought to this land, there have been bonding elements--glue--which have functioned to keep alive in our communities a sense of kinship, of commonality. Some of these bonding elements have been: our perception of ourselves and the folks next door, across the street, around the corner, and so forth as all being parts of an extended family; a sense of the commonality of our oppression; and a shared moral code.

The degree of these bonding elements' potency varied from region to region, being strongest in small communities in the South and probably the Midwest and weakest in the crowded slums of the Northeast. But in the period of WWII and for about the first ten years following the War, a number of things happened to set into motion the relatively rapid diluting of the strength of these bonding elements. Africans' access to comparatively high-paying jobs in the auto, steel, and related industries placed us in closer proximity to fulfillment of the American Dream and its selfish sibling, materialism. But this closer proximity did something else. It brought into clearer focus America's economic contradictions, as manifested by

the oftentimes stark contrasts between the living conditions of certain African people and certain other African people living in the same neighborhoods, sometimes right next door to each other or directly across the street.

And along came television, which, among the other things it did and does, intensified our desire for the material symbols of middle-class(and, later, upper-class) economic status and further heightened the contradiction between the general African economic reality and that of the Caucasians on the small screen. Further, television greatly assisted in the process by which we were being alienated from ourselves. Television told us that the only people who had power and money were Caucasian, that the only people who were, or could be, heroes were Caucasian. Tarzan and Superman could do things our fathers could never do, would never be able to do. But beyond the matter of the messages the tube delivered to us and the images it set before us, there is this--that it wasn't long before our parents discovered that these magical boxes would "care for" their children at no extra cost.

But while these forces, and others as well, were working to dilute the glue which had been holding our communities together, the inevitable great falling apart was forestalled by the arrival of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, and other individuals and groups who functioned, as a whole, to give us our own real heroes; to remind us of our common oppression and give us a common set of institutional targets for our anger; to let us know that "blackness" was something we could have pride in; and to give us a collective sense of direction. In fact, during the period(s) of the civil and human rights and black pride and black power movements, African-on-African crime, which had already become alarming in some locales, markedly decreased in many cities.

Through assassination of certain of our leaders, catalysts, and spokespersons and the jailing or otherwise neutralizing of others, America crippled our collective efforts before they could reach full flowering, full maturity.

To use biblical allegory, Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, and others like them casted the devil out from our body in the period from the mid 1950s through approximately 1970. Since then, the devil has returned, and with many partners. The conditions which made us open to the voices of Malcolm and the other "exorcists" still exist and, in many ways and places, have become more severe. Un- and under-employment in African communities ranges from high to sky-scraping. Close to a half million African men fill America's jails and prisons, which further aggravates the situation in which there is a numerical imbalance between our men and women and which means that significantly fewer African men are available as real(as opposed to simply biological) fathers. The Jeffersonian(as in "The Jeffersons") idea of "movin' on up" often finds its interpretation, in reality, in moving on out of "the ghetto" to seek validation by living among relatively upper-crust Caucasians. This leaves growing numbers of African youth having to look to dope-dealers, pimps, and other such persons who "make it" at our expense as their real-life role models.

The situation is such that we have thousands of African youth who, having been programmed to believe that the only worth they have exists in whatever property they own and/or money they possess, look around and see too many African people who are employed having little or nothing, too many African people who are unemployed and have nothing at all, too many African people who seem to be powerless. Yet, at the same time, they see that it is the drug-dealers, pimps, and assorted hustlers who are driving the luxury cars, wearing the expensive threads, and having their arms around the fly women. They see these things and they want them.

Should we expect otherwise? Have we done anything to counteract this idea that we are what we have, that conspicuous consumption is what's hap'nin'? Have we done anything to counteract the idea that "I'll get mine" is the first commandment? No, even the "respectable" among us--our preachers, politicians, and business professionals commonly go for the gold at the expense of our communities' interests. Our big-time entertainers and ath-

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FLAME Editorial Policy

The HARAMBEE FLAME, the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization(parent chapter of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, Inc.) is a pan-Africanist newsletter. This means that the FLAME's priority, with respect to news and views, is African people, events and developments which affect us and are, or should be, of concern to us. The FLAME does not recognize any artificial distinction between African people based solely on place of birth. Therefore, references to African people are made on the basis of our common ancestry. An exception to this policy is the reprinting of articles, or excerpts thereof, from other publications, in which cases we do not alter the terms used therein to fit our editorial policy.

Articles contained in the FLAME do not necessarily represent the official positions of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization unless they are accompanied by a statement identifying the views as being those of the organization. Generally speaking, all unsigned articles are by the editor, Mopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa(aka David Rice).

We encourage you to submit articles to the FLAME. Please enclose with your submission a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should not exceed 900 words. Short stories are subject to the same restriction with respect to length. We also welcome poetry and graphics. Send your submissions to: HARAMBEE FLAME
Attn: Editor/Mondo
Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org.
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68502-0500

Note on poetry submissions: We are looking for poems that make effective use of imagery, that have beauty and power, and that do not sacrifice any of the above for the sake of rhyme and/or uniform rhythm patterns. Send stuff!!

From Other Sources

Murderers of MOVE People Receive Bounty

(The city of Philadelphia) "has rewarded four of the cops responsible for the MOVE bombing with disability pensions at 70% of their full pay. Alleging emotional stresses resulting from their part in bombing the MOVE home," (they) "have each been given...from $19,000 to $21,000 per year.

-Above passages excerpted from page 8 of the March edition of PARTISAN DEFENSE COMMITTEE: CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES. "The city of Philadelphia" is in parentheses because the article from which the above passages were excerpted does not make clear which specific governmental body awarded the pensions.

Profile On Sweet Honey In The Rock

"The group's musical style ranges from Chicago blues to West African melodies, traditional folk songs, classic Black Baptist hymns, reggae, spirituals, field hollers and work songs and improvised jazz...Home for the group is Washington, D.C., where each of the women is an active community member...Sweet Honey In The Rock has performed for sell-out crowds at New York City's Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, Blues Alley, Constitution Hall and in eleven cities in Japan..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Sweet Honey Performs In Benefit Concert," which appears on page 5B of the March 24 edition of the COLUMBUS CALL & POST.

The African Situation In The U.S./Contrasting Figures

"...Between 1970 and 1980 the number of poor Blacks rose by 24% from 1.4 million to 1.8 million. Proportionately, three times as many Blacks as whites live in poverty. The overall Black median income is 57% that of whites, a decline of nearly four percentage points since the early 1970s. The rate of unemployment for Black youth is more

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letes, more often than not, show a willingness, and frequently an eagerness, to appear on television and play veritable coons for Caucasians. Generally speaking, the kind of ruthless materialism that lies at bottom of so much of that gang activity which results in African-on-African violence is followed because it is seen by members of our youth as "the only game in town" with respect to values.

The youth in our poor neighborhoods are not blind to our condition and are not blind to the fact that we adults don't seem to be doing anything to change it. They see our frustration, despair, whatever it is, whatever we choose to call it. In these youths' eyes, it is cowardice and/or impotence. In their eyes, we are wimps. But unlike the African youth in Azania(So. Africa), who have become impatient with their parents and have snatched the reins of struggle(for change) from them, many African youth here have simply accepted things as they are and decided they're going to milk what's available for whatever it's worth.

Lacking the sophisticated knowledge of "the system" that our politicians, business professionals, and other such persons have, these youth gangs are using the methods and tools that they know how to use, and the results are often messy. They wind up dying. We wind up dying. We have turned our children over to the television and our youth over to the bizarre supervision of the streets. We are now getting a destructive return on our pathetic non-investment. We have taken on individualism and stupidly sat by while that community-mindedness, which had held us together for so long, has been rapidly slipping through our collective fingers. As a result, that feeling of belonging to a community and having kinship with it, which we once had and, unfortunately, took for granted, is no longer available to the youth in many of our communities. This translates into a situation in which it is not uncommon for youth gang members, as well as other persons, to rip off, physically assault, or otherwise abuse their Sisters and Brothers and to do so minus a sense of their having violated themselves. Moreover, for many of these youth, gangs represent a kind of family solidarity that is

missing on their own actual families.

(We will conclude this discussion in the May edition of the FLAME by talking about, among other matters, the role that racism plays in this issue of gang formation and activity and the deterioration of our communities that has contributed to it. We invite your comments.)

-Mondo

Civilian Police Review -A.R. Byndon

This past February a community forum was held at Horace Mann Junior High during which the Mayor, Public Safety Director, and other city officials heard testimony from a diverse group of individuals complaining about negative attitudes and behavior on the part of police officers and excessive force used by them in making arrests. The scope and intensity of the complaints were clear evidence that recent calls for the creation of a civilian police-review board are legitimate and justified.

But is the African-American community hearing any serious talk about the formation of any civilian police-review board? No, what we are getting is an earful of statements of concern, suggestions as to possible options, sounds but no substance.

One proposal would have the Police-Community Relations Office moved a few blocks to 24th and Lake. However, good police relations with the community begins with each officer on the force and each officer's accountability to someone. But, unfortunately for the victims of police assaults and killings, that "someone" is not our community but the police department itself.

Another proposal would entail the intensification of observation of police trainees by the Citizen Police Academy. But members of our community are not subjected to brutality by police in training at the Academy but by police working in our community.

As one community member remarked recently: "It is ironic that police officers can be summarily fire for shoplifting in various department stores. Nevertheless, when standard operation procedures are not followed and African-Americans are abused or killed, those officers receive commendations instead of reprimands." The facts supporting the validity and accuracy of such a remark substantiates the notion that the Omaha Police Department has a code of conduct which needs to be brought under closer community scrutiny.

Another carrot thrown out to the community was that of the Department acquiring national accreditation. This would place local standard procedures in line with those followed by police departments in other specified cities. Community spokespersons have commented that some of the suggested model-cities' histories with regard to police abuse of citizens are atrocious and are already being reflected here.

Capitulating somewhat to community pressure, the Omaha Police Department has accepted the idea offered by some individuals and groups within the community of incorporating sensitivity training into the overall training program for its officers.

The city's Director of the Human Relations Office approached Dr. George Garrison, Chairman of the University of Nebraska's Black Studies Department, and asked him to present a budget for the providing of sensitivity training. Amid questions about why groups that are more community-based were not considered, the Human Relations Director stated that "they(Black Studies Department) know our history and culture." The complaint has been made, though, that three of the four Black Studies staff persons, having been in Omaha less than a year, have not had the opportunity to become adequately familiar with the African-American community and the nature and history of its relations with the Omaha Police Department.

Sensitivity training, accreditation, moving of the Police -Community Relations Office, etc. are simply not enough. They amount to nothing more than "Kibbles 'n' Bits,"

thrown out to our community to quiet us. We have an opportunity now to make headway on the issue of civilian review. If we drop this issue and accept some counterfeit remedy, we will be condemning ourselves to repetitions of the past--Richard Kellin's death, Kevin Watson's death, etc. In addition, with our facing rampant drug use in the community, the rise of gang activity, and other such problems, it should not be difficult for us to figure out the implications of a substantial decrease in respect for the police and a worsening of the already bad relations between them and our community.

For us to accept anything less than civilian review of the police is for us to sell the birthright of our people and to spit on the graves of those who have struggled in our behalf.

A'Jamal lives and works in Omaha; hosts a weekly cable t.v. program, "Minority Forum"; and is actively involved in community efforts to address the problems that face it, particularly with respect to education.

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than double that of white youth. In 1986, 42% of all Black families were female-headed, the majority of which were below the poverty line.

"...the percentage of Blacks earning more than $35,000 a year rose, in constant dollars, from 15.7% in 1970 to 21.2% in 1986. In the past five years the average income of Blacks has increased, with 8.8% now earning more than $50,000 a year. Nationwide, there has been a growth in the number of Black-owned businesses and there are more than 300 cities with Black mayors.

"...but the most disheartening news...is the phenomenal increase of the so-called Black 'underclass', which since the 1970s has grown to compose nearly a third of the Black population. Mired in a seemingly endless cycle of despair below the poverty line($11,203 for a family of four), it is this class that is composed of the hard-core unemployed, where violent crime festers and where homicide is the greatest cause of death among men between 25 and 35 years of age..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Black Paradox 20 Years After Kerner," which appears on page 2 of the March 16 edition of THE GUARDIAN.

Self-Help Peasant Groups In Africa

"...Halidou Sawadogo is standing next to the potato cellar he designed in his home village of Seguenega, Burkina Faso. It stands 10 feet underground, with a special ventilation system that ensures the temperature is a constant 15 degrees C. below the temperature outside. Yet, Mr. Sawdogo never finished primary school...

"Sawadogo typifies a new attitude among many African peasants. He and other peasant leaders are the spearhead of a sizable movement that is bringing peasants together in small groups, and fundamentally changing life in many African villages. Confident, innovative, and committed, they are bent on achieving self-reliance...

"The peasant groups either work singly - in Kenya, there are an estimated 16,000 to 25,000 separate such women's groups - or they organize into large and potentially powerful federations...

...

"A striking characteristic of this movement is that it is made up of women -though they do not often appear at the head of the organizations. In the Sahel, women make up between two-thirds and three-quarters of the organized peasants. In some areas of Kenya, they make up more than 90 percent. The dominant role of women is partly because they produce about 75 percent of Africa's food, and because, in some areas, the men have gone to the cities looking for work...

"In many regions, it is also leading to significant improvement in living standards and nutrition...In some areas, young men with high school diplomas are leaving cities to come back to the villages to work, and in many areas jobs created by the village groups are slowing down emigration of young men and women..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Self-Reliance For Survival In Africa," which appears on page 15 of the March 9 edition of THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR.

Looking At Jamahirija

"...In explaining Libyan society and how it works, Libyans stress the fact that there is no government, no parliament, nor formal head of state. Instead, there are three levels of people's committees; technically all authority is vested in these committees. This is the heart of the people's authority, the Jamahiriyan system...

"During the rest of our stay, we visited other sites in Libya...Finally we were dropped off at the Green Square in Tripoli and told to go wherever we pleased...And then we plunged in for an afternoon of roaming the streets to speak to the people.

"For all that is written about Libya's shaken economy,

the signs are few. What you see on the streets and in the countryside of Libya are not hooded terrorists practicing their car bombings and guerrilla war tactics, but a multi-racial society at work, building roads, houses, medical centers. Children go to school. There are no signs of unrest, no beggars on the streets and no one without a home. There are no visible signs of military tensions and there are few police on the streets of Tripoli. The police you do see around certain office buildings or in downtown Tripoli do not wear guns.

"Libya is not a western society; there are customs and habits that are difficult for westerners to understand. One question that came up often was that of the role of women. Women are free to wear what they like, drive cars, work, and go to school..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Understanding The Libyan Revolution," which appears on pages 13 and 14 of the March 31 edition of THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE.

Africa's Debt Crisis

"...Since 1980, the debt problem has dominate major continental and regional African conferences. It is the focus of deliberations at other international meetings with sizable African official participation...

"A significant factor in Africa's declining economic situation has been the instability of the dollar, largely the result of the Reagan administration's economic philosophy and practice. Currency volatility has meant wild increases in Africa's import bills and sharp declines in export revenues. The slump in prices of African export commodities drastically reduced the countries' foreign exchange reserves needed to pay for imports...

"One of the most important factors propelling African indebtedness was the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s(including the Middle East oil crisis) gripping the advanced capitalist countries. The recessions in Western economies reduced their growth rates and their

demand for African products. These events put pressure on the prices of African commodities--which are now the lowest in 50 years. On the other hand, Western countries passed on their inflation by hiking prices of exports to Africa, reducing Africa's ability to import and increasing the cost of African manufacture, as well as African fertilizer-dependent agricultural production. As a result, Africa's trade deficits mounted and in most countries overall output declined...

"In the structure of dependency, the transnational corporations wield control over the production of and trade in Africa's products. The UN Conference on Trade and Development estimates transnationals control 75%-95% of trade in African minerals and agricultural raw materials. They profit from Africa more than from any other region..."

-Above passages excerpted from "Africa's Greatest Tragedy: Foreign Debt," which appears on page 12 of the March 23 edition of THE GUARDIAN.

BACK IN TIME

"The word 'separation' is misused. The 13 colonies separated from England but they called it the Declaration of Independence; they don't call it the Declaration of Separation, they call it the Declaration of Independence. When you're independent of someone you can separate from them. If you can't separate from them it means you're not independent of them.

Malcolm X, March 19, 1964

Source: THE LAST YEAR OF MALCOLM X by George Breitman

Announcements

The Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization will hold its annual banquet on May 8th at the Nebraska State Prison, 14th & Pioneer Blvd. in Lincoln.

On Friday, April 29th, State Senator Ernie Chambers will address a luncheon of the National Black Police Association at the Red Lion Inn in Omaha. This will be one of a number of activities planned for the April 28-30 conference, which is being sponsored by the Brotherhood of Midwest Guardians. For more information, call 455-2271.

The fifth national conference of the National Alliance of Third World Journalists will be held April 21-24 at Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia. It will feature workshops, panels, exhibits, international film festival, analyses on disinformation campaigns, media case studies, alternative news sources, and low-intensity conflict in the age of information technology. For details, contact: NATWJ; P.O. Box 43208; Washington, D.C.; 20010.

The sixth Pan-African Conference will take place on Indiana State University campus April 21-23. The theme is "Africa And Us." For information, call or write Dr. Francois N. Myumba, Center for Afro-American Studies, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809. Telephone: (812) 237-2550.

BLIND LADY QUARTERLY is a magazine you might be interested in checking out. This quarterly publication, edited by Richard Marquantte, is primarily concerned with justice, or injustice-related issues. In addition to essays, the magazine also runs poetry and short stories. Send inquiries to: BLIND LADY QUARTERLY; 7624 South Harlan St.; Littleton, CO.; 80123.

BLACK? GIRL

-Sarah A. Johnson

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Hey girl, yeah you, Black? girl, that's right.
I saw you, yeah you, on that cold winter's night.
You was trying, trying with all yo might, trying yo damndest to be white.

I saw you, yeah you, in yo "white man's" den puttin' that bleaching cream all over yo black skin.

Saw you at the drug store, but you turned yo back.
You asked the pharmacist for some blue colored contacts.

Black? girl, you've changed...yo hair, yo eyes, yo name.
But the funny thing is, you still look the same!
Yo hair is still nappy, yo face is still brown, and look at yo lips. They still profound.

Black girl,
Black is no hue obliterated from the skin,
nor is it concealed by remedies from your den.

So stop trying to deny it,
be proud of yourself.
If you can't love you,
how can anyone else?

Sarah Johnson is a student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and a member of the African People's Union. She is from Omaha.

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